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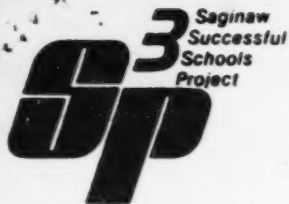
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ABSTRACT

The Saginaw Successful Schools Project (S3P) was described and evaluated using data collected from 1980 to 1985. S3P is a school improvement project based on instructional and school effectiveness research findings; but the starting point for change is determined by staff in each of the 31 school buildings. The School Improvement Survey (SIS) was administered to school staff to evaluate teamwork and communications, administrator teacher relationship, school effectiveness, and instructional effectiveness. SIS results were used to create a building profile, which was used by the building staff to identify potential areas of improvement. The staff agreed on a plan, which was implemented, monitored, and evaluated. Staff commitment to S3P was assessed; it has increased from 1983 to 1985. Goals listed in each school's building plan were studied; levels of satisfactory attainment were reported for 70 to 100 percent of the goals. Data from the Michigan Educational Assessment Program indicated reading and mathematics achievement in grades 4, 7, and 10. California Achievement Tests (CAT) data were available for reading and mathematics in grades 1, 3, 5, 8, and 11. It was concluded that the results appeared promising. A number of specific recommendations are appended. (GDC)

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AN ASSESSMENT OF THE
SAGINAW SUCCESSFUL SCHOOLS PROJECT:
A LOOK AT THE DATA

Dr. Richard N. Claus
Charmaine J. Girrback
School District of the City of Saginaw
550 Millard Street
Saginaw, Michigan 48607

"Evaluation '85"
Toronto, Ontario
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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Background Information

Public education has made many attempts to evaluate or assess the quality of its services. Early efforts were based on rather simplistic outcome measures. In the late 60's and early 70's studies by researchers such as Jencks, Coleman, and others concluded that, in general, public schools were ineffective. This literature also indicated that family related variables (income, race, education, and occupation) were the primary factors in explaining student academic achievement.

Over the last 10 or 15 years, a large body of instructional and school effectiveness research has established the fact that these early claims were incorrect. These more recent studies used newer, sophisticated procedures and techniques and refuted the earlier findings. Further, this later research has identified variables (procedures, techniques, conditions, etc.) which all, or in part, are under the influence and control of the schools and which, when addressed properly contribute to making schools more effective. The philosophy espoused in this literature is that all children can learn, schools can and do make a difference, and schools can influence and control variables which contribute to increased learning. Renowned educational researchers including the late Ronald Edmonds, Wilbur Brookover, Madeline Hunter, and J. Brophy all contributed to this body of literature.

This instructional and school effectiveness research is the foundation upon which the Saginaw Successful Schools Project (S³P) is based. It follows,

therefore, that this information is the beginning point for school improvement. It is the springboard for action--the best and most current information that educators have at their disposal to improve school effectiveness.

A Definition

Stated simply, the Saginaw Successful Schools Project (S³P) is a structured and yet flexible approach to improving the quality of education in the Saginaw Public Schools. It is a structured approach in that the instructional and school effectiveness research serves as the basis for change. It is flexible in that the direction of approach to change is not predetermined and involves educators at all levels in the process.

In addition to relying on the instructional and school effectiveness research, the project also incorporates proven elements of group dynamics and organizational and management theory. This literature tells us that: 1) In order to change or improve, the school building must be recognized as the key unit rather than only high level administrators; 2) The school's organizational climate will influence the success of school improvement efforts, therefore, it must be dealt with in order to effect improvement; 3) School staff members must participate and play major roles in determining the type and direction of the improvement efforts; and 4) Ownership and commitment to school improvement efforts are the result of shared planning and decision making.

S³P is a "grass roots" project that is highly participatory and allows building staff members to become involved in identifying and solving those problems which the staff has cooperatively agreed upon to be the greatest

need areas. In other words, decisions about what the problems are in a given building and how to solve those problems are determined by those persons who are the most knowledgeable and intimately involved. It is shared decision making at the lowest appropriate level. The role of other support personnel (central office administrators, evaluation, social workers, etc.) is one of aiding and guiding decisions that are made at the building level.

The local definition of an effective school adopted by the S³P Task Force (Steering Committee) follows:

THE EFFECTIVE SCHOOL:

- Maintains high expectations for staff and students;
- Establishes a well-disciplined, secure and wholesome learning environment;
- Teaches to clear, specific goals and objectives with attendant plans to achieve them;
- Monitors and evaluates pupil, teacher, and administrative staff performance on a regular basis;
- Utilizes a continuous staff training model that supports building level annual program plans;
- Maintains clean and orderly school buildings;
- Improves student achievement in the basic skills.

All of the above factors are essential in establishing an effective school.

The Process

In order to assist each school to identify and focus on potential areas of improvement, individual staff members examine their own building with an instrument known as the School Improvement Survey (SIS).¹ The School

¹The SIS was originally developed cooperatively by Dr. Ron Urick of Wayne State University and the Michigan Department of Education's Michigan State Improvement Project (MSIP).

Improvement Survey, which was developed in light of the instructional and school effectiveness research, examines four broad areas that are, to a considerable extent, controlled or influenced by staff members. The four areas are:

Areas Assessed by the School Improvement Survey

1. Teamwork and Communications,
2. Administrator-Teacher Relations,
3. School Effectiveness, and
4. Instructional Effectiveness

The individual results of the survey are compiled to form a building profile. This profile allows the building staff to identify potential areas of improvement. Staff members are also allowed to include other potential areas of improvement that may not be addressed on the survey. The building staff then, as a group, determines what the top need areas are in their building and develops a school improvement plan to address them. Plans must contain the following elements.

Key Elements of a Building Plan

1. The activities or events designed to address the needs identified
2. The timeline for the activities
3. The expected outcomes or results
4. The methods of evaluating the results
5. The key persons responsible for carrying out the activities or events
6. The costs (if any)

The entire staff must then agree to the school improvement plan. The plan is then implemented and monitored throughout the school year. At the end of the implementation period, building staff gather data to evaluate the outcome of their efforts. In this manner, all staff members have become involved in developing the plan, are aware of building goals and objectives, and are involved in the implementation and evaluation of the school improvement plan.

PROCEDURES FOR EVALUATION

The evaluation of large school reform efforts (something larger than the "little red school house") presents an interesting challenge because it represents an evaluation of the collective performance of many school sites. The S³P reform effort represents one such urban school district example. The school buildings (24 elementary and seven secondary sites), each with a unique set of needs, start planning to bring about improved educational effectiveness. The S³P definition of an effective school presents a broad and multiple set of parameters which a school may or may not choose as a list of worthwhile targets. The "bottom line" to all reforms in education is hopefully improved academic achievement. Improved test scores may not result immediately from implemented improvements in school climate, communication patterns, trust of building personnel, etc. Thus while the improvements in climate, communication or whatever may be evident, it may not be directly or immediately traceable to some intended outcome or process (student scores, instructional arrangements, etc.). Early responses to reforms (more of this or that) should be differentiated from mature ones (higher quality, refined delivery, etc.). Thus with a decentralized building based model for school effectiveness it may not be possible to trace directly the long-term outcome (improved performance of students) to the original set of complex interventions. This is especially true for S³P because the model is eclectic and builds upon many interventions, some started in the 1970's, in the Saginaw Public Schools.

A new evaluation design is called for to gauge the success of school effectiveness programming in urban K-12 school districts. Incremental improvements no longer are apt to tell the whole story because their effect may add

up to more or less than the sum of the parts. Most school districts today cannot afford elaborate studies that attempt to track the wide assortment of incremental improvements. The opportunity of evaluators of large school effectiveness projects is to identify multiple "unobtrusive" indicators of effect or effectiveness that make maximum use of existing data sources. The design calls for a series of mini-investigations that probe the school system undergoing change from a number of different vantage points. The results from the evaluation planned herein will be far from definitive, but rather exploratory and descriptive.

The data for this present evaluation were drawn from source documents starting with 1980-81 and ending with the 1984-85 school years. The major activity of S³P as a defined project at the building level of involvement started in Spring, 1982. To assess the progress of the project the following data sources were reviewed and analyzed as secondary sources of information relative to the impact made by S³P.

- School Improvement Survey Results
- Staff Commitment to S³P
- S³P Building Plans
- MEAP District Results: Five Years of Achievement
- Standardized Achievement Test Results

School Improvement Survey

The School Improvement Survey (SIS) was administered in May, 1983 and again in December, 1984 to all participating staff members. This survey measures how the individual views his/her school in terms of effectiveness characteristics--both "current" situation as well as "should/could be" situation. The individual responses are then combined to get a picture of how district employees, collectively, perceive the educational system.

Figure 1 depicts the May, 1983 results as a baseline equated to 100% of a need for each of the four effectiveness areas. Using this as a starting point, the December, 1984 results were used to gauge the amount of change seen after approximately 1.5 years of S³P operation.

All four effectiveness areas indicated a reduction of need (ranging from 7.4% to 14.3%). The smallest reduction in need was in the area of school effectiveness, while the greatest reduction came in instructional effectiveness. The two remaining areas--communication/teamwork and administrator/teacher relations were reduced by 13.7% and 10.1%, respectively.

Based upon the results, certain conclusions can be derived; however, caution must be used in interpreting the data.

- The adoption of the "Instructional Theory Into Practice" (ITIP) concept both preceded and co-existed with the inception of S³P. Therefore, many of the characteristics under the instructional effectiveness area were already at the forefront in terms of staff involvement and perhaps easier to assess.
- A shared ingredient of both ITIP and S³P was the need for an increased amount of staff cooperation for them to be successful. This could be one explanation as to why the communication/teamwork area also enjoyed a significant reduction.
- The school effectiveness area, which showed the least amount of reduction, included the "climate" variables. It appeared that much of the dissatisfaction was focused on an area where solutions may be hard to find or more difficult to implement.

School Improvement Survey District-Wide Results

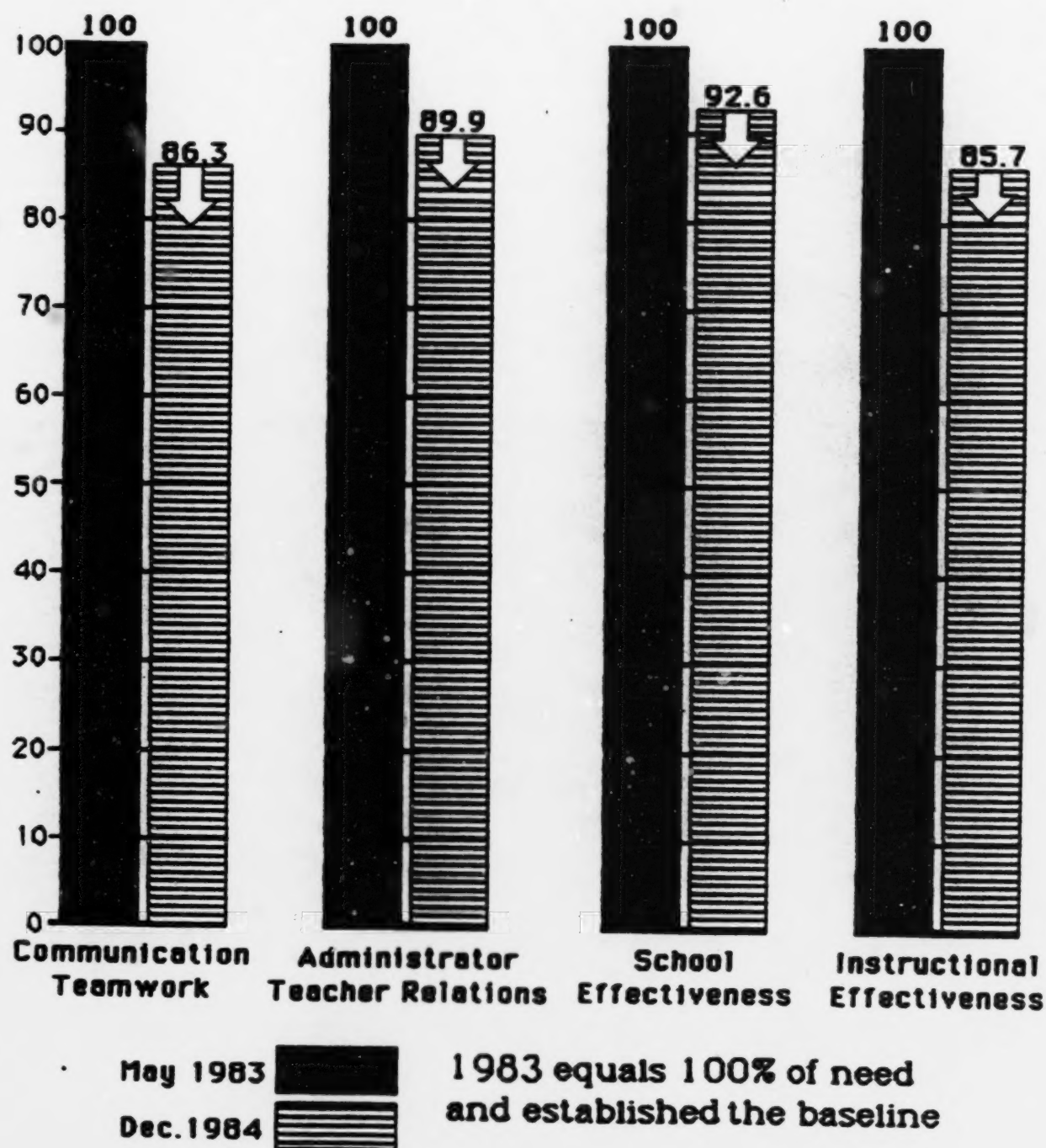


Figure 1 13

Staff Commitment To S³P

Another indicator of change may be derived from assessing the commitment of staff to the S³P process. Again the information was gathered individually and then consolidated for each building and, ultimately, for the district.

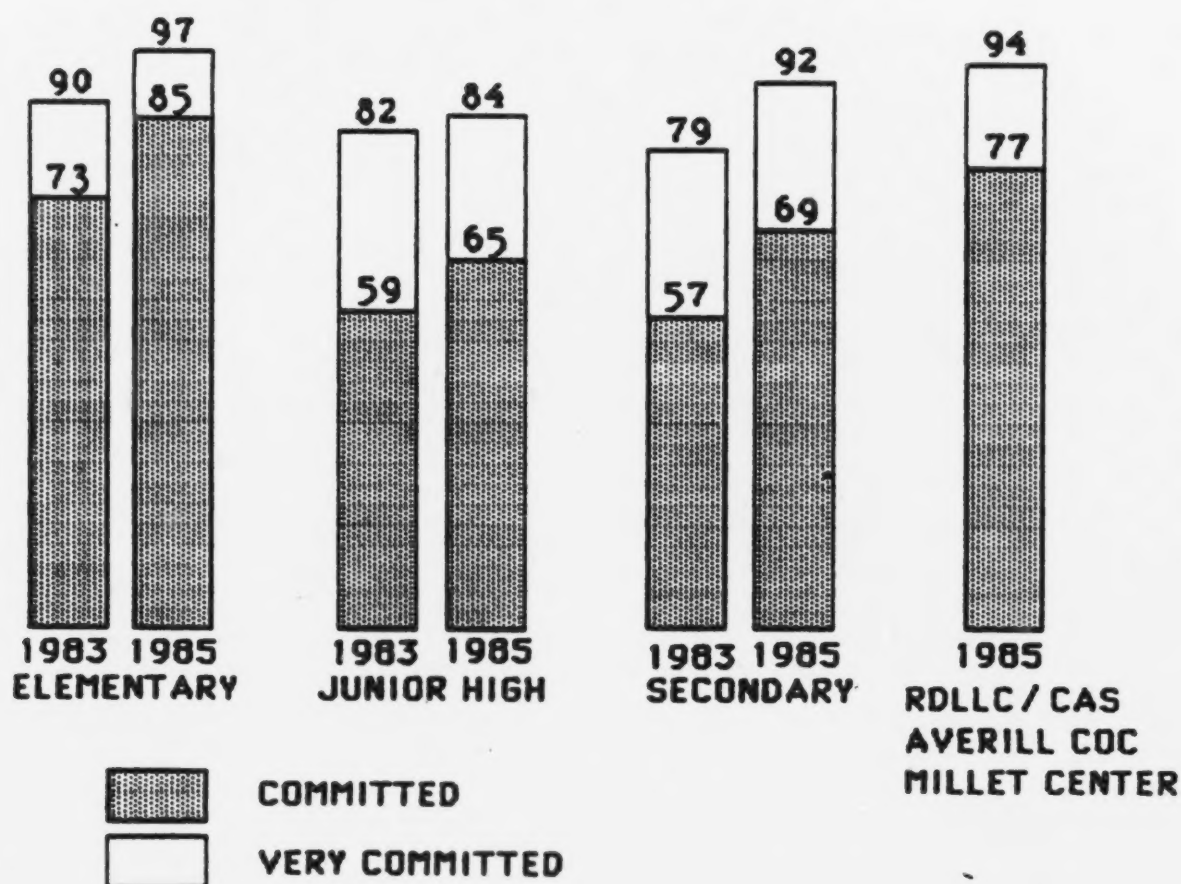
The commitment sheet required each staff member to indicate their level of interest in pursuing the school improvement process. This step was performed in 1983 and again in 1985. The amount of change (i.e., the increase in the percent of staff indicating that they were committed or very committed) should provide another indicator of S³P's success. Figure 2 compares 1983 and 1985 commitment levels by elementary, junior high and senior high categories. In addition, a separate category is given for programs added during the 1984-85 school year.

Elementary schools demonstrated the greatest percent of commitment in 1983 and in 1985. Secondary (senior high) buildings, on the other hand, had the lowest percent of commitment from its staff in 1983 and the greatest increase in the percent of staff being committed and very committed (from 79% to 92%). The junior high segment showed the least amount of overall change over the two year period (82% in 1983 and 84% in 1985).

An analysis of the results indicates that:

- Elementary school staffs, in general, appear to demonstrate the most interest in participating in the school improvement process;
- Junior and senior high school staffs were almost identical in 1985 to their 1983 commitment levels;
- Senior high school staffs showed the greatest increase in percent of staff interested in school improvement;
- Percent of staff indicating little or no interest was reduced significantly at the elementary and senior high levels--from 10% to 3% (70% reduction) at the elementary level and 21% to 8% (62% reduction) at the senior high level. Junior high staff interest showed little change--18% in 1983 and 16% in 1985 (11% reduction).

Staff Commitment to S³P



DIFFERENCES FROM 100% INDICATE LITTLE OR NO INTEREST.

S³P Building Plans

The outcome of the S³P planning process was a school plan which was to serve as a guide for building level activities from November, 1983 through June, 1985. The plan resulted from each building staff reviewing their SIS data, setting 3 to 6 building level goals, and then specifying objectives and related activities to accomplish the goals. The plan also specified dates, expected outcomes, evaluation methods, key persons, and costs for each activity. By June, 1985 each of the 31 buildings' staff was to submit a final review of the actual outcomes to its plan, an assessment of whether the outcome was satisfactory or unsatisfactory, and future action relative to the activity (i.e., continue, continue with modification, or drop).

This set of building plans and their associated final evaluations was another source of data to describe the actions undertaken to implement the S³P process and gauge the success of the outcomes from the perspective of the school's staff. The building goals were chosen as the unit of analysis. To categorize the goals, the eleven critical variables of the S³P along with variables included on the Revised Connecticut School Interview (i.e., materials and equipment, parent involvement, homework, grading system, policy manual, tutorial/individualized/small group instruction, teacher accountability) plus three other variables (i.e., basic skills improvement, open and candid communication, and pride in school) were used to group the 142 goals. "Satisfactory" attainment was represented by goals having a majority of the activity outcomes being assessed as "satisfactory" by building staffs in their final reviews.

The chart on the next page is the result of the analysis strategy described above with the goal area categories ranked by frequency of occurrence (from high to low). The following points are evident from a review of the chart.

- Within the top ten goal areas, 7 of these (70%) can be found in the S³P variables. A review of the entire set of goals shows that 10 of the 11 critical variables were included in one or more buildings plan.
- Goal areas within the eleven critical variables that required greater direct visible school administrator involvement (i.e., principal sets high expectations and clinical supervision by the principal) were either absent or mentioned only by a single building.
- The category "Basic Skills Primary" is tied for the fifth and sixth ranked position with the category "Parent Involvement" with a frequency of 13. It should be noted that this goal area was to be required to be in all 31 plans by the Superintendent of Schools.
- Levels of satisfactory attainments were quite high (ranging from 70% to 100%).

S³P GOAL AREAS IN BUILDING PLANS
RANKED BY FREQUENCY OF OCCURRENCE--

<u>RANK</u>	<u>GOAL AREAS</u>	<u>FREQUENCY</u>	<u>PERCENT WITH SATISFACTORY ATTAINMENT</u>
1	Clean and Orderly Climate *	20	70%
2	Open and Candid Communication	19	95%
3	Structured Approach to Teaching *	15	93%
4	High Teacher Expectations *	14	79%
5.5	Parent Involvement	13	77%
5.5	Basic Skills Primary	13	100%
7	Fair and Firm Discipline *	10	80%
8	Positive Reinforcement *	8	100%
9	Time on Task *	7	86%
10	Monitoring and Periodic Feedback *	6	100%
11.5	Use of Assessment Data *	4	75%
11.5	Staff Development *	4	100%
13	Material and Equipment	3	100%
14	Tutorial Instruction	2	100%
16.5	Clinical Supervision By Principal *	1	100%
16.5	Homework	1	100%
16.5	Policy Manual	1	100%
16.5	Pride in School	1	100%

* Goal area that defines one of the eleven critical variables.

MEAP District Results: Five Years of Achievement (1980-1984)

The Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) is a set of objective referenced tests which measure the reading and mathematics basic skills of all fourth, seventh and tenth grade students state-wide. These skills are measured in the fall of each year.

MEAP assesses students' performance at these three grades to measure their proficiency in minimal reading and mathematics objectives as they complete:

- Early elementary and enter upper elementary (Grade 4),
- Upper elementary and enter junior high school (Grade 7),
and
- Junior high school and enter senior high school (Grade 10).

Critical skills are measured in each content area (e.g., vocabulary and comprehension in reading and whole numbers, fractions and geometry in mathematics). Various numbers of objectives are used to measure a given skill area. Three test items are used to assess each objective. A student must correctly answer two of three items (66.7%) to achieve objective mastery.

Summary MEAP data can be provided in a variety of ways. Perhaps the most informative is the Proportions Report which shows the percent of students mastering reading and mathematics objectives at various achievement levels. Those levels (Categories of Achievement) and number of objectives mastered within each category are shown in the chart below for each grade and content area.

Range of Objective Attainment in Each
Category of Achievement

Category of Achievement	Number of Objectives			Mathematics Grades 4, 7 & 10
	Grade 4	Reading Grade 7	Grade 10	
4	19 - 25	17 - 23	18 - 24	22 - 28
3	13 - 18	12 - 16	12 - 17	15 - 21
2	7 - 12	6 - 11	6 - 11	8 - 14
1	0 - 6	0 - 5	0 - 5	0 - 7
Total # of Objectives	25	23	24	28

Students must attain approximately 75% (Category 4) of all reading and/or mathematics objectives to master the test(s). Category 3 reflects approximately 50-74% attainment, Category 2: 25-49% and Category 1: 0-24%.

MEAP was revised in 1980; therefore, comparisons with results prior to that date are discouraged due to changes in the test. Data and trends presented in this section will reflect achievement and change over the last five years (1980-1984) for the school district. In part, the changes observed have been caused by new programs and initiatives undertaken under the S³P umbrella of school improvement activities.

The graphical summary of MEAP reading and mathematics in Figures 3 and 4 below contain proportion data from Category 4 (highest achievement) and Category 1 (lowest achievement) for grades 4, 7 and 10. The most noteworthy findings include:

- Continuous gains in the highest achievement category and reductions in the lowest achievement category for both reading and mathematics during the five year period, 1980 to 1984.
- System-wide, in 1984:
 - Greatest achievement occurred at Grade 4 in both reading and mathematics with 66.3% and 83.3% of the students, respectively, scoring in the top category.

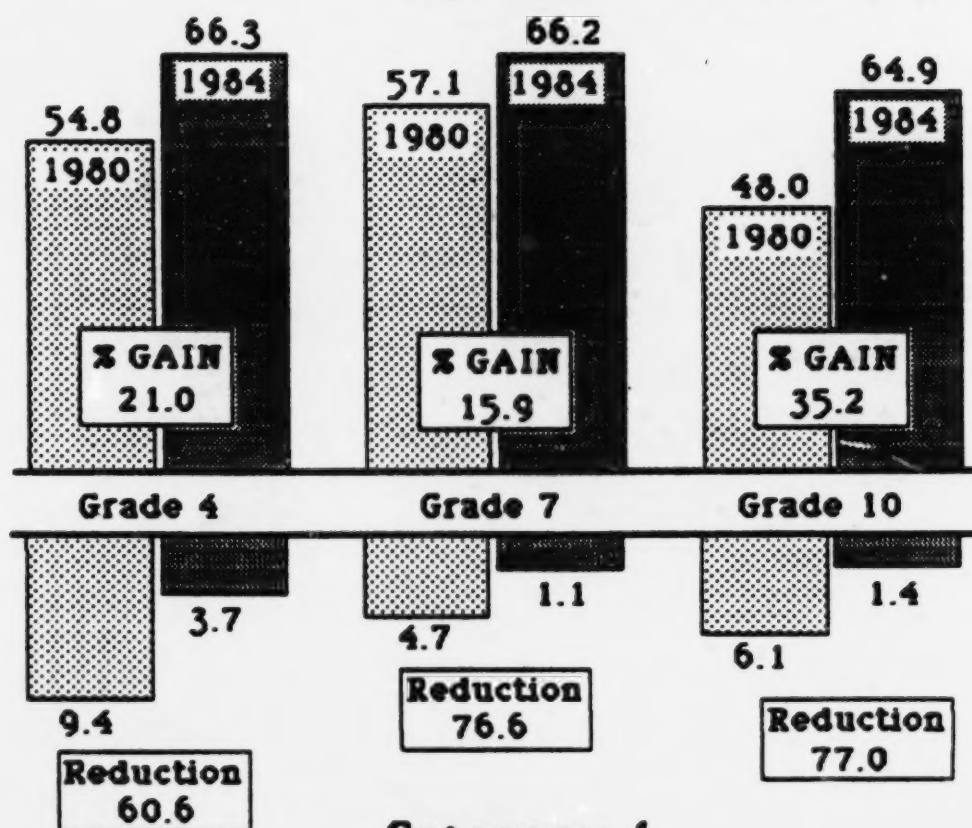
- Reading scores were greater than mathematics scores at Grades 7 and 10, while mathematics scores were greater at Grade 4.
- The percent of students mastering the reading test was approximately the same at all three grades (65%), while the percent of students mastering the mathematics test decreases from Grade 4 to 7 to 10.

M.E.A.P.

Reading

1980-1984 Results

Category 4 Highest Achievement



Category 1 Lowest Achievement

Figure 3

M.E.A.P.

Mathematics 1980-1984 Results

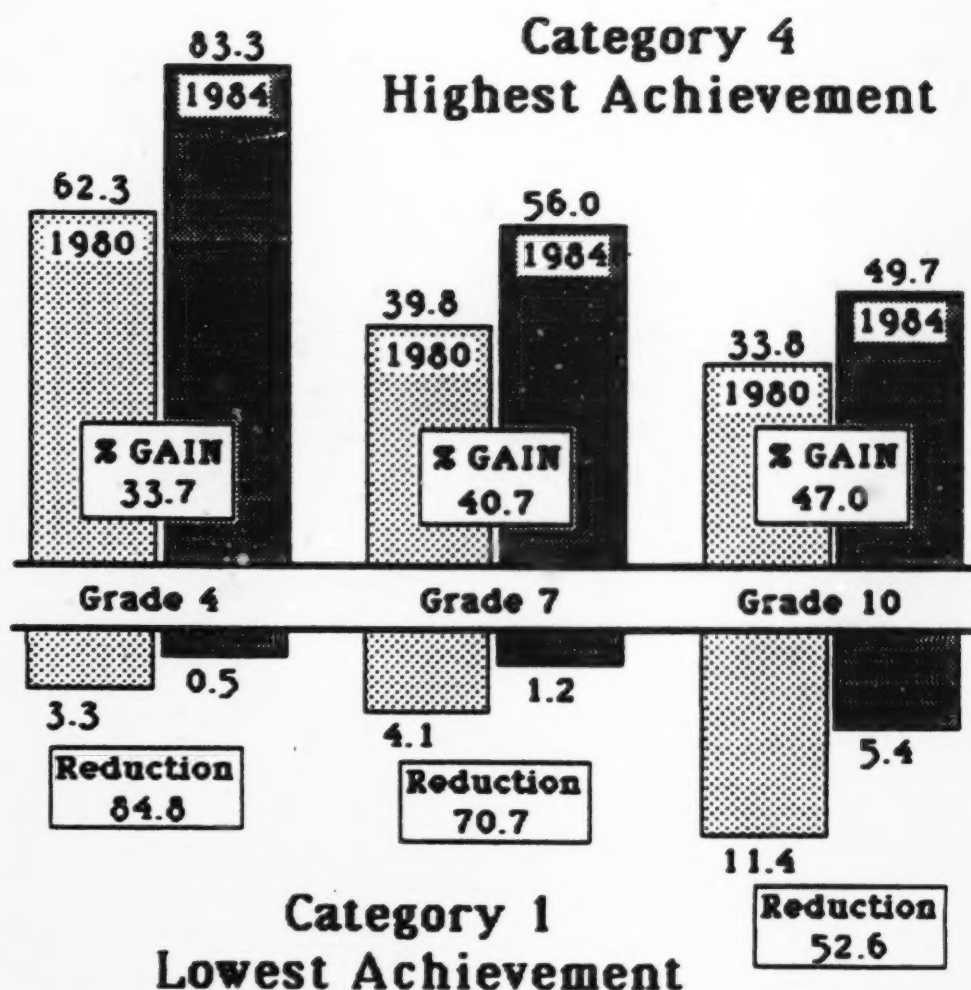


Figure 4

Standardized Achievement Tests Results

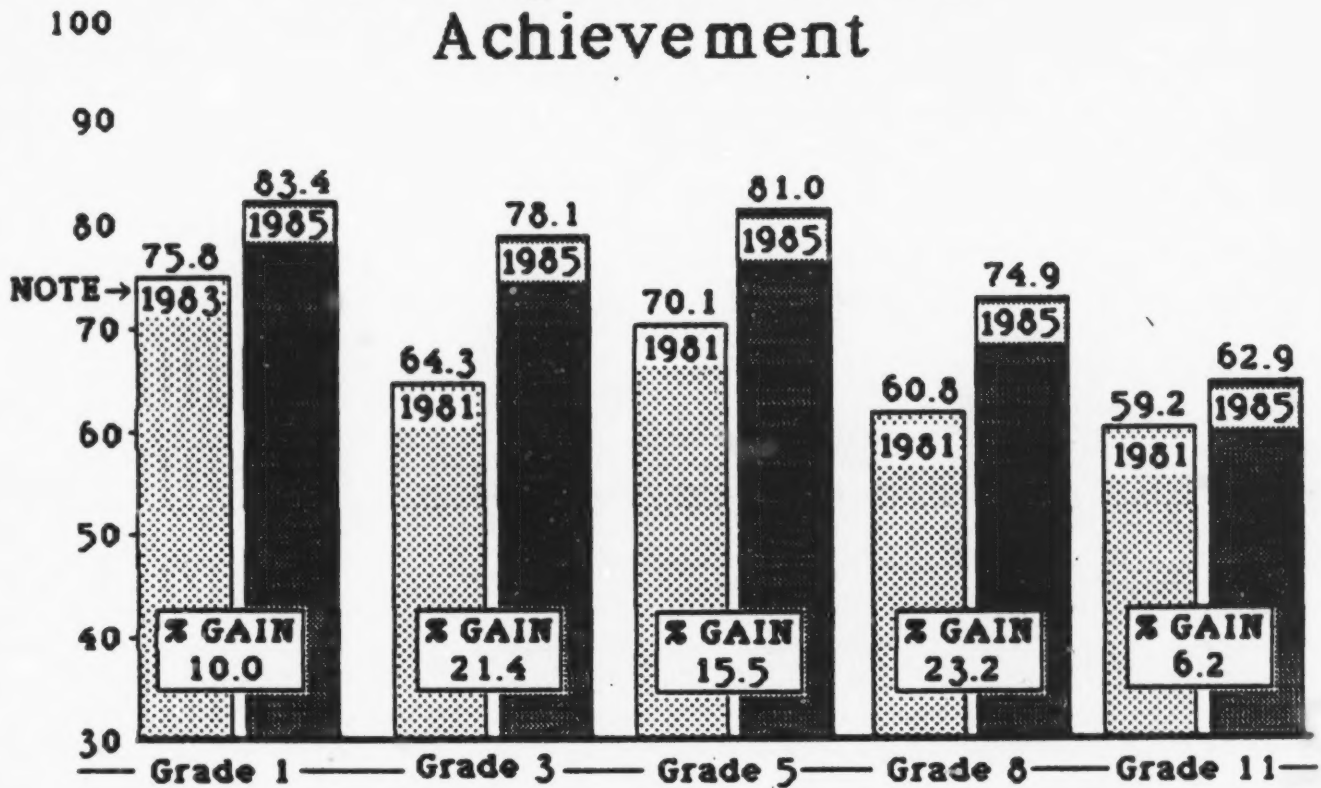
Another data source which may reflect the influence of S³P is the district's annual achievement test results. Grades 1*, 3, 5, 8 and 11 are assessed each year, using the California Achievement Tests (CAT). A review of the reading and mathematics results by grade level, using 1981* and 1985 as points of comparison, can be seen in Figures 5 and 6.

Achievement gains (i.e., an increase from the 1981 baseline in the percent of students scoring at or above the 25th percentile) occurred at all grade levels in both subjects, ranging from 6% to 23% in reading and 6% to 28% in mathematics. Secondary (grades 8 and 11) results for 1981 were lower in both areas as compared to elementary results; however, 1985 results indicated that grade 8 experienced the greatest gains in reading (see Figure 5) while grade 11 had the greatest mathematics gains of all grade levels (see Figure 6).

* Grade 1 was added to the annual testing plan in 1983.

CAT Reading 1981-85 Results

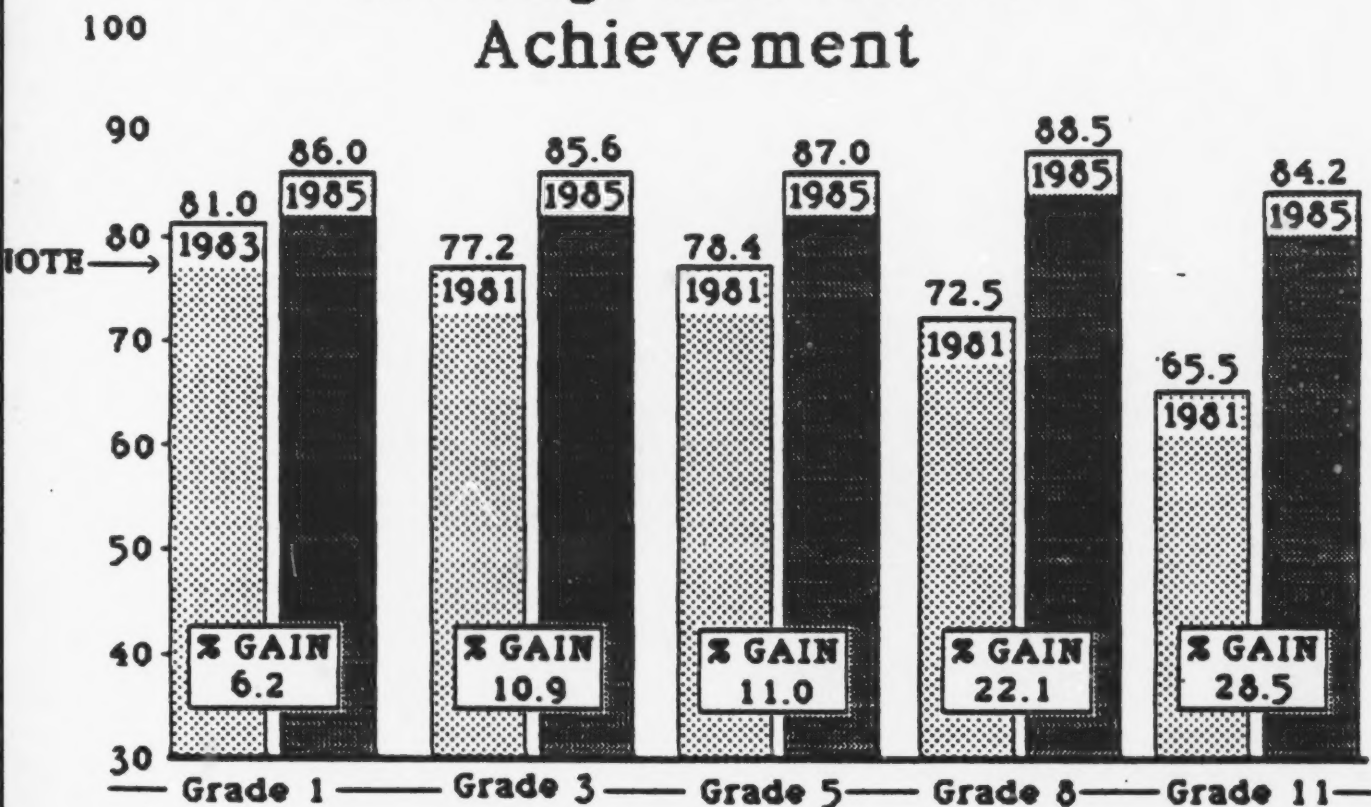
Average and Above
Achievement



NOTE: First Year CAT was given at Grade 1

CAT Math 1981-85 Results

Average and Above
Achievement



NOTE: First Year CAT was given at Grade 1

SUMMARY

The Saginaw Successful Schools Project (S³P) is one urban school district's attempt to address the ongoing need for school improvement in the 1980's. S³P is a structured and yet flexible approach to improving the quality of education at 31 elementary and secondary school sites. It is structured in that it draws upon instructional and school effectiveness research as the basis for change. It is flexible in that the starting point for change was determined by building based staffs.

This evaluation drew upon secondary data sources starting with 1980-81 and ending with the 1984-85 school years. These sources included: School Improvement Survey results, staff's level of commitment to the change process, building plans, Michigan Educational Assessment results, and standardized achievement test results. The outcome was an explorative look at and descriptive statement of where the S³P process has taken the Saginaw Public Schools at the end of the 1984-85 school year.

The picture appears promising in terms of starting a building based change process. This process is not without its faults. To overcome these weaknesses a number of recommendations follow that hopefully will serve the best interests of S³P, as well as, other similiar school improvement projects.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are offered to help improve S³P to meet its goal of more effective schools.

1. To further improve language arts achievement at the junior and senior high school levels, curriculum should be revised to provide for instruction of silent sustained reading and writing for meaning in all context areas.
2. To allow building principals more confidence in their ability to behave as effective instructional leaders a number of essential elements are needed.
 - An active professional development program needs to be instituted for school administrators.
 - Role playing exercises are needed to be conducted as part of the additional training of administrators.
 - Building administrators should be encouraged to display in a cooperative manner their instructional leadership role in the development of their building plans.
3. To better distribute research on instructional effectiveness a number of steps should be planned.
 - Distribute research findings expressed in behavioral terms on how teachers and principals can be more effective in their respective roles.
 - Make videotapes that show effective behaviors of teachers and administrators in practice.
 - Allow administrators more opportunities to provide clinical supervision of teachers.
 - Establish a professional development center for teachers that would house the facilities to review research literature, view videotapes, practice instructional techniques, etc.
4. To help increase the level of commitment to the S³P process, a few suggestions could be offered.
 - A newsletter concerning S³P should be developed to pinpoint successes at a number and variety of building sites (i.e., elementary and especially the secondary levels).

- The S³P Steering Committee should at the beginning of each year determine a plan of action concerning the major undertakings of the project and their timing. The purpose of this is to make all personnel aware of the course and direction of the project. A formal evaluation of the efforts should also be specified.
- S³P leadership should review the umbrella of support services available to further and support this district-wide project. These support services (e.g., staff training, compensatory education programming, data based decision making, etc.) should be fine tuned to better support the efforts of S³P. Programming efforts should be maintained and improved to show the administrative commitment to the current course of action.
- The S³P Steering Committee should develop a list of activities to set in motion the mini-grant idea for teachers who wish to enhance or develop an instructional technique or school effective practice that would further their building plan.